DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 290 400 HE 021 091

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TITLE The Role of Parents in the College Selection Process.
PUB DATE 29 Oct 87
NOTE 29p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Southern Association for Institutional Research and the Society for College and University Planning (New Orleans, LA, October 28-30, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Bound Students; *College Choice; College Freshmen; *Enrollment Influences; Higher Education; Parent Attitudes; *Parent Background; Parent Financial Contribution; Parent Participation; *Parent Role; Questionnaires; School Community Relationship; Student Recruitment; Surveys

ABSTRACT

This study of parents' role in the college selection process is part of an ongoing market research agenda at a small, private, liberal arts college. Data were gathered from parents of currently enrolled freshmen about the information they needed to make informed decisions about which school their child would attend and the information they received. A questionnaire was mailed to a stratified random sample of parents of 300 new freshmen enrolled in the fall of 1986, with at a response rate was 58%. Results included the following: (1) the majority of responses were from parents of females; (2) the respondents live predominantly in the Southeast; (3) almost all were involved to some degree in college selection; (4) the majority were involved in every aspect of the decision; (5) the "ideal" was a school with an enrollment between 2,000 and 3,999, within 100 to 200 miles of their home, and costing between $5,000 and $9,999; and (6) financial aid was not a deciding factor for the majority. The parent survey instrument is appended. (Author/KM)

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THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE COLLEGE SELECTION PROCESS

A Paper Presented at the
1987 Conference of the Southern
Association for Institutional Research
New Orleans, Louisiana
October 29, 1987

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THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE COLLEGE SELECTION PROCESS

Abstract

This study of parents' role in the college selection process is part of an ongoing market research agenda at a small, private, liberal arts college. The purpose of this study was to gather data from parents of currently enrolled freshmen about the information they needed to make informed decisions about which school their child would attend and the information they received. Data from this study--and studies done with four other constituent groups--will help those on campus responsible for marketing to disseminate the kind and amount of information helpful to parents and their college-bound children in the college selection process.

The Conference Theme and This Study

Enrollment management will continue to be a focus of college administrators in the 1990s. To manage the size and characteristics of their enrollments, college administrators need to know what their image is among various constituent groups and how best to attract the type of students they want. This study is part of a long-term research agenda for market research. Plans have been made to continue to gather information over a five-year cycle from alumni, enrolled students, parents of students, the inquiry pool, and the community. Through these various research projects, a continuing evaluation is made of the school's "image," the information that constituents desire about the school, and how best to present the information.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE COLLEGE SELECTION PROCESS

Introduction

Parents play an important role in the decisions young men and women make concerning college. Parents are involved in the most fundamental decision--to go or not to go--and in the final decision--this school or that one. Researchers for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching found in their 1985 survey that the majority of college-bound seniors said their parents were more important than their guidance counselors, teachers, admissions officers, or peers in selecting a particular school. A spokesman for the Foundation wrote in Change magazine (November/December 1986) that colleges have a responsibility to parents to make a full array of information available and to respond carefully to questions raised. Ernest Boyer, president of the Foundation, in an article in the Phi Delta Kappan (December 1986) challenged colleges to help college-bound students and their parents closely match their interests and hopes with as the goals of particular institutions. Many institutions of higher education are accepting the challenge and doing "image" studies toward the end of presenting their institutions with integrity and attracting students who "fit" the educational and social environment of the institution.

Marketing in higher education is of growing interest and the number of articles on the topic of marketing are increasing in the literature. While many articles deal with the college selection process, few deal entirely with any one aspect of the process. Information about parents' role in the process are most often included in articles about parents' part in the financial aspect of college selection. For example, while not the focus of the

articles, parents' role in paying tuition is understood in such articles as Fortune's "Why College Bills Don't Level Off" and The Washington Monthly's "Highbrow Robbery: The Colleges Call It Tuition, We Call It Plunder" (two criticisms that colleges are inefficiently and poorly run) and Newsweek's "Is College Worth It?" and Educational Record's "Beneath the Surface: College Is Not as Costly as It Seems" (two views more sympathetic toward colleges).

Review of the literature produced a thirteen-page bibliography of books, articles, and unpublished papers on marketing (in higher education); a copy of the bibliography is available in the university's Office of Institutional Planning and Research. Appended is a selected bibliography related to the topic at hand.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study was to gather information from parents about their part in the college selection process, including what information they received from schools and what information they needed in order to make informed decisions. Their responses have been made available to the Marketing Task Force, a committee composed of administrators and faculty members who guide the marketing programs at the site of the study.

Data Sources

Parents of currently enrolled freshmen were chosen as the population for study because (1) they have recently gone through the college selection process and (2) their reflections would deal with policies currently in effect and admissions literature currently being used. The instrument used to gather

data was a questionnaire mailed to a sample of the population. From the population of parents of the 687 new freshmen enrolled in the fall of 1986, a stratified-random sample of freshmen's parent(s) was selected. The population of freshmen was divided into male and female groups (309 men, 378 women). A random sample was drawn from each group. The sample of parents (of 135 men and 165 women) was chosen to reflect the proportion of each sex among the new freshmen (45 percent male, 55 percent female). In April 1987, the 300 questionnaires were mailed. The questionnaires were sent by U.S. Mail and self-administered by the recipients. Questionnaires were mailed first class, postage hand affixed. They were accompanied by a cover letter under the letterhead of the Office of Institutional Planning and Research and signed by the Coordinator of Institutional Planning and Research. The cover letter outlined broadly the goals of the research and emphasized that the survey responses would be treated with strict confidentiality. To assure anonymity to respondents, no name was requested, which precluded a second mailing to non-respondents. The questionnaire, Parents Survey, was developed from three sources: (1) a review of the literature about parents' role in the college selection process, (2) a questionnaire developed by the Admissions Marketing Group (AMG) for use in a survey of the parents of all students who had inquired about the school (known on campus as the inquiry pool) in 1985, (3) results of earlier market research done by the Office of Institutional Planning and Research with enrolled students about their parents' role in their college selection process. The questionnaire consists of sixteen questions. A copy of the instrument is available in the university's Office of Institutional Planning and Research. Fifty-eight percent of the questionnaires were completed. As the questionnaires arrived, the responses were coded and entered in a microcomputer so that when the file was considered

complete, the data could be transferred to the mainframe where an SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) program was run on the data. Two programs were used, one to obtain frequency distributions, then one of crosstabulation to look more closely at small groups' responses. All the percentage figures and tabulations in this report are based on the number of parents who completed the survey and the opinions they expressed unless otherwise stated.

Analysis of Data

Responses to the questionnaires are grouped for this profile of parents' opinions around the following topics: background information, the parents' role and involvement in the selection process, what they consider ideal size, price, and distance of a school from home, their views about the cost of a college education and of church-related and non-church-related schools, their sources of information in the selection process, and characteristics they considered important to know in choosing a college for their children.

Background Information

Questionnaires were returned from twenty-three states. Three out of four responses (74.3 percent) were from parents who live in the Southeast.[1] Thirty percent live in South Carolina. More questionnaires were sent to parents of female students than to male students (45 percent male, 55 percent female to reflect the proportion of each sex among the new freshmen), and an even larger proportion of the responses were from parents of female students (39.8 percent male, 60.2 percent female). Parents reported that Furman was the first choice of nine out of ten of the freshmen and eight out of ten of the parents; less than 5 percent of the parents indicated Furman was their third or less choice.

[1]Southeast is defined as Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

Parents' Role and Involvement in Selection Process

Parents were asked to indicate from a list of six options (ranging from "I stayed out of the process completely" to "I was involved from start to finish") what their role was in the child's selection of a college. Almost all (99.1 percent) indicated they were involved to some degree; less than one percent (.9 percent) indicated the decision was up to the child and the parent was not involved. The majority (52.7 percent) responded, "I was involved in the decision from the time my child started thinking about college. I took a very active interest in reading and discussing most of the literature/information my child received." Another fourth (25.5 percent) said, "My child did much of the research on colleges on his/her own. I took a more active role in the final application procedure once he/she had narrowed down the list of possibilities."

From a list of twenty-four aspects of the selection process (e.g., reading literature, campus visits, applying for financial aid), parents were asked to indicate in which aspects of the process they were involved. All (100 percent) indicated they read at least some of the literature sent by schools; two thirds (66.4 percent) read the material from most of the colleges and universities. Nine out of ten (90.3 percent) accompanied their child on visits to campuses. Three out of four (75.2 percent) said they discussed the cost of attending different schools, but only a third (35.4 percent) set a limit on how much they would pay. Half or more encouraged their child to attend a school with a liberal arts curriculum (60.2 percent) and to apply for merit/achievement scholarships (52.7 percent). Few encouraged their child to apply to the the parents' alma mater(s) (17.9 percent), to schools with career-related courses (23.0 percent), to schools within a hundred miles of home (13.4 percent), and/or to a state-supported school (8.0 percent). See Table 1 for the options and the percentage of parents who indicated their involvement in each aspect of the selection process.

Table 1. Parental Involvement in College Selection Process

Aspects of Involvement	Percentage of Parents Who Were Involved
Read the materials from most of the colleges and universities.	66.4
Just read the materials from colleges my child said he/she was interested in.	37.2
Read none of the materials sent by institutions.	0.0
Accompanied my child on visits to campuses.	90.3
Joined in on my child's campus interviews.	66.4
Did not visit any colleges with my child.	2.7
Encouraged my child to consider a liberal arts college.	60.2
Encouraged my child to concentrate on business administration.	6.2
Felt that my child should have an education that is practical.	35.4
Thought my child would be happier in a small school.	83.2
Thought my child would be better off at a large university.	.9
Set a limit on how much I/we could afford to pay for college.	35.4
Discussed the cost of college with my child.	75.2
Encouraged my child to consider a state-supported school.	8.0
Preferred my child to stay within 100 miles of home.	13.4
Encouraged my child to look at colleges in other parts of the country.	41.1
Contacted institutions to request more information for my child to consider.	31.3
Encouraged my child to apply to my/my spouse's alma mater.	17.9
Strongly encouraged my child to apply for merit/achievement scholarships.	52.7
Encouraged my child to consider schools that offer career-related courses.	23.2
Encouraged my child to attend a private college.	36.6
Encouraged my child to consider a religiously affiliated college/university.	37.5
Discouraged my child from applying to my or my spouse's alma mater.	4.5
Wanted my child to attend a prestigious institution.	42.3

Characteristics of "Ideal" School

As they began their search for the best school for their child to attend, each parent had in mind an "ideal" school. It is not surprising that characteristics most of the parents thought "ideal" are characteristics of the school in which the study was done, since it was overwhelmingly their first choce of schools. The questionnaire asked them to describe the "ideal" school in terms of size, cost, and distance from home. Two thirds said the school's enrollment should be between 2,000 and 3,999. Fifteen percent preferred a school of 1,000 to 1,999 enrollment, and another 15 percent preferred an enrollment of 4,000 to 6,999. Less than 1 percent (.9 percent) thought 7,000 and over was ideal, and only 2.8 percent said less than a thousand is ideal. The majority (53.8 percent) considered ideal a school 100 to 200 miles from home. About 30 percent (29.2 percent) said 200 to 499 miles away is ideal. More than two thirds (67.9 percent) considered the ideal price of tuition to be between $5,000 and $9,999. A few (17.9 percent) chose (10,000 to $11,999 as ideal, and still fewer (13.2 percent) chose $2,000 to $4,999 as ideal. Less than 1 percent said $1,999 or less was ideal, and none said $12,000 and over was ideal.

Cost of a College Education

Related to cost of the child's education, parents were asked if they encouraged their child to apply for financial aid and if receiving financial aid was important to where they enrolled. Seven out of ten (69.6 percent) encouraged their child to apply for financial aid, although the majority (59.8 percent) indicated that whether the child received financial aid was not a deciding factor in where the child enrolled. Just over half the parents (51.3 percent) indicated that their child received financial aid. Slightly more of the parents (60.9 percent) indicated they had expected to receive financial aid.

Parents were asked about the importance to them of several factors related to cost (e.g., total cost, amount they would be expected to pay). They were asked if they received the information they felt they needed from Furman. Nine out of ten (94.4 percent) rated as important to them to know the "total cost"; 62.6 percent rated it very important, and 31.8 percent rated it moderately important. Four out of five indicated that the following factors were important to them: "amount of money we were expected to contribute from our own resources" (88.2 percent); "availability of merit or achievement scholarships" (87.0 percent); "the way the institution responded to questions about financial aid" (87.0 percent); and "early evaluation on amount of aid" (85.6 percent). Their responses indicated they felt they got "about the right amount" of information in these areas from Furman. Table 2 shows the data related to the importance of information about financial information and the amount of information they received from Furman.

Table 2

Information Related to Cost of College Education

Factors Related to Cost That Parents Considered	DEGREE OF IMPORTANCE			AMOUNT OF INFORMATION		
	Very Important	Moderately Important	Not At All Important	Too Little	About Right	Too Much
Total cost	62.6	31.8	5.6	5.1	92.9	2.0
Amount of money we were expected to contribute from our own resources	58.8	29.4	11.8	15.8	82.1	2.1
The way the institution responded to questions about financial aid	54.0	33.0	13.0	14.6	83.1	2.2
Early evaluation on amount of aid	56.7	28.9	14.4	17.2	79.3	3.4
Availabilty of merit or achievement scholarships	57.0	30.0	13.0	28.4	68.2	3.4
Availabilty of alternative payment plans	41.2	34.0	24.7	21.4	76.2	2.4
Size of need-based loans	39.2	28.9	32.0	23.2	74.4	2.4
Size of need-based grants	40.6	26.0	33.3	24.1	73.5	2.4

Another question listed twenty sources of information and asked parents to rate the sources on a scale of one to five from "not at all useful" to "extremely useful." A sixth option was given for those who had "no opinion" about the source item. Table 3 lists the sources and how the parents rated them. It shows that the highest rated source was campus visits; four out of five (84.7 percent) rated visits as very useful or extremely useful (22.5 percent very useful, and 62.2 percent extremely useful).

About three out of four rated college publications and admissions requirements as very useful or extremely useful (college publications, very useful, 41.8 percent, extremely useful, 24.5 percent; admissions requirements, very useful, 42.7 percent, extremely useful, 27.3 percent). A majority rated the following as very useful or extremely useful: contacts with admissions officers (very useful, 37.2 percent; extremely useful 25.7 percent); college guidebooks (very useful, 33.3 percent; extremely useful, 22.5 percent); and personal contacts with students who attend (very useful, 31.8 percent; extremely useful, 23.6 percent).

Table 3

Usefulness of Sources of Information

Sources of Information	Not at all Useful	Slightly Useful	Moderately Useful	Very Useful	Extremely Useful	No Opinion
a. College publications	1.8	3.6	26.4	41.8	24.5	1.8
b. Admissions requirements	0.0	1.8	24.5	42.7	27.3	3.6
c. Personal contacts with students who attend	4.5	6.4	27.3	31.8	23.6	6.4
d. Personal contacts with graduates	8.4	15.0	20.6	25.2	14.0	16.8
e. Personal contacts with professors	15.6	15.6	22.9	18.3	13.8	13.8
f. Contacts with admissions officers	2.7	8.0	23.0	37.2	25.7	3.5
g. Campus visits	.9	1.8	10.8	22.5	62.2	1.8
h. High school counselors	25.7	21.1	21.1	17.4	11.9	2.8
i. High school teachers	28.7	20.4	23.1	16.7	6.5	4.6
j. College days/nights to meet college representative	20.4	17.6	18.5	24.1	12.0	7.4
k. College recruiters who visited the high school	21.7	17.0	23.6	19.8	6.6	11.3
l. Telephone calls from students	23.8	18.1	21.9	18.1	3.8	14.3
m. Contacts from coaches	36.2	3.8	10.5	7.6	10.5	31.4
n. Publications from specific departments at the school	22.9	12.4	22.9	16.2	12.4	13.3
o. Publications written by students attending the school	23.8	17.1	21.0	12.4	3.8	21.9
p. Receptions held in your area	28.6	18.1	10.5	11.5	3.8	27.6
q. Contacts from former students	24.8	10.5	22.9	15.2	6.7	20.0
r. Friends and/or children of friends	18.9	14.2	22.6	16.0	14.2	14.2
s. Videos	31.8	3.4	17.8	6.5	1.9	33.6
t. College guidebooks	4.5	11.7	24.3	33.3	22.5	3.6

Characteristics of Church-Related and Non-Church Related Liberal Arts Colleges

From a list of twenty characteristics describing institutions of higher education, parents were asked to choose which characteristics they believed to be more true of church-related liberal arts colleges and which they believed to be more true of non-church-related liberal arts colleges. They were also offered the option of saying the

characteristics listed were true of both kinds of schools or not true at either kind of school. They characterized church-related schools as more conservative and more restrictive. The majority indicated that the following characteristics are more true of church-related schools: "There is more social regulation" (77.7 percent), "political and social values are conservative" (69.6 percent), "instill lifelone values" (67.8 percent), "give students an extension of their own family" (64.8 percent), "students are nurtured" (59.2 percent), and "strong sense of community" (52.0 percent). Nine out of ten (89.4 percent) believed both kinds of schools are intellectually stimulating, and four out of five believed that both kinds of schools prepare students for careers (86.4 percent) and that the graduates of both kinds of schools have success (82.5 percent). Table 4 lists the descriptions and the percentages of parents who attribute each characteristic to the two kinds of schools.

Table 4

Description of Church-Related and Non-Church-Related Colleges

Selected Descriptions of Colleges	More true at non-church-related liberal arts colleges	More true at church-related liberal arts colleges	True of both	Not true of either
a. Considered top-notch	14.3	16.2	67.6	1.9
b. Strong sense of community	5.9	52.0	39.2	2.9
c. Political and social values are conservative	5.9	69.6	16.7	7.8
d. Graduates have greater success	4.9	7.8	82.5	4.9
e. Students are isolated from real life	1.0	18.3	13.5	67.3
f. There is more social regulation	4.9	77.7	7.8	9.7
g. There is a strong sense of tradition	4.9	36.9	57.3	1.0
h. Students are nurtured	5.8	59.2	29.1	5.8
i. Students develop a more complete philosophy of life	7.7	48.1	42.3	1.9
j. Students develop a sense of personal responsibility	4.8	33.7	61.5	0.0
k. Prepare students for careers	5.8	3.9	86.4	3.9
l. Intellectually stimulating	3.8	5.8	89.4	1.0
m. Provide intelligent role models	3.8	24.0	72.1	0.0
n. There is a sense of social responsibility	3.9	49.5	46.6	0.0
o. Instill lifelong values	5.7	67.8	26.7	0.0
p. Give students an extension of their own family	4.8	64.8	21.0	9.5
q. There is a basis of common experience	3.9	39.2	52.0	4.9
r. Provide diversity	25.5	7.8	63.7	2.9
s. Take an academically narrow point of view	4.9	14.7	7.8	72.5
t. Emphasize personal growth in addition to academic achievement	3.0	46.5	49.5	1.0

Characteristics Important to Parents

Two questions dealt with characteristics of a college that the parents were looking for in choosing where their child would attend. One question listed twenty-two characteristics and asked parents to rank them on a one-to-five scale from "not at all important" to "extremely important" in their consideration of a school. The other question contained thirteen sets of contrasting characteristics and asked parents which they preferred, e.g., one set was, "use of alcohol permitted on campus" and "use of alcohol prohibited on campus."

From a list of twenty-two selected characteristics, 99.1 percent rated as very important or extremely important that the school have "a high quality program." Four out of five parents judged the following characteristics to be very important or extremely important: graduates get good jobs, 87.5 percent; development of personal values (be) stressed on campus and in the curriculum, 84.0 percent; people on campus are friendly, 80.6 percent; faculty are more involved in teaching than in research, 80.5 percent; high-ability students find the college attractive, 80.1 percent. The majority consider the following characteristics to be very important or extremely important: a wide variety of courses, 77.0 percent; a place where students spend a lot of time studying, 77.0 percent; good reputation among high school counselors, 64.6 percent; reasonable tuition, 62.5 percent; a Cultural Life Program which includes presentations on religious, political, and social issues, 60.2 percent. Table 5 shows responses.

Responses to the question on characteristics asking for parents' preferences clearly indicated that parents prefer a school where "most students live on campus" (93.6 percent), the "faculty are well-regarded for teaching" (92.2 percent), "the use of alcohol is prohibited on campus" (85.2 percent); "strict rules of conduct are enforced" (74.3 percent); and "social life is campus centered" (72.9 percent).

Table 5

Importance to Parents
of Selected Characteristics of Colleges

Selected Characteristics	Percentage of Parents Stating Importance					
	Not at all Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Very Important	Extremely Important	No Opinion
a. a high quality program	0.0	0.0	.9	28.3	70.8	0.0
b. a faculty more involved in teaching than in research	.9	.9	13.3	46.0	34.5	4.4
c. more emphasis on liberal arts courses than on career-related courses	7.1	9.8	37.5	36.6	7.1	1.8
d. a wide variety of courses	0.0	2.7	19.5	54.0	23.0	.9
e. a place where students spend a lot of time studying	.9	1.8	19.5	57.5	19.5	.9
f. high-ability students find the college attractive	.9	.9	17.1	52.2	27.9	1.0
g. people on campus are friendly	.9	4.4	13.3	43.4	37.2	.9
h. more emphasis on career-related courses than on liberal arts	20.5	19.6	36.6	17.0	3.6	2.7
i. many different clubs and activities are available	5.4	16.2	45.0	27.0	6.3	0.0
j. excellent food service and living arrangements	0.0	8.0	39.8	32.7	18.6	.9
k. active social life at the college	2.7	17.9	40.2	33.9	5.4	0.0
l. pretty campus	4.4	18.6	46.9	23.9	6.2	0.0
m. availability of financial aid	17.0	10.7	16.1	25.0	27.7	3.6
n. reasonable tuition	5.4	8.0	21.4	27.7	34.8	2.7
o. graduates get good jobs	.9	1.8	9.8	36.6	50.9	0.0
p. good reputation among high school counselors	4.4	4.4	23.0	34.5	30.1	3.5
q. equal emphasis on liberal arts and career-related courses	6.3	9.0	34.2	32.4	13.5	4.5
r. commitment to helping students adjust to living on their own	.9	1.8	17.0	54.5	25.9	0.0
s. a Cultural Life Program which includes presentations on religious, political and social issues	.9	8.0	29.2	35.4	24.8	1.8
t. development of personal values stressed on campus and in curriculum	.9	0.0	15.2	52.7	31.3	0.0
u. considered prestigious	6.3	14.3	33.9	33.0	12.5	0.0
v. private institution	22.1	14.2	33.6	20.4	8.0	1.8

The last section of the questionnaire gave parents an opportunity to list the most important, second most important, and the third most important information they wanted to know about schools to which their child applied. Eight out of ten (84.1 percent) listed quality of education among the top three things they wanted information about; a majority (63.7 percent) listed it first. Campus life and values and financial information were named by the next largest number of parents. Campus life and values was named as first by 9.7 percent of the parents, second by 10.6 percent, and third by 17.7 percent of the parents; 45.1 percent ranked information about costs and financial aid among the three most important things they wanted to know about a school.

Crosstabulation of Grouped Responses

To add to the profile of parents' responses to the options offered on the questionnaire, responses to some of the questions were further analyzed to see if responses varied based on whether the respondent has a son or daughter enrolled at Furman, on whether the parent lives in South Carolina or elsewhere, and whether a pattern could be detected among their responses to related questions.

Examination of the responses of parents, in rating the importance of twenty-two selected characteristics of a college, revealed no significant difference in opinions between parents of male students and of female students about the importance of eighteen of the characteristics. (See list of characteristics in Table 5.) The four characteristics on which there was significant difference in opinion dealt with the social atmosphere or living conditions. In each case, more parents of female students considered the following statements/characteristics important: (1) People on campus are friendly; (2) Many different clubs and activities are available; (3) Excellent food service and living arrangements; (4) Active social life at the college. It should be noted that a majority of all the parents considered these characteristics important. (See Table 5.)

A second question about colleges' characteristics was also examined; respondents were asked to tell if each of a list of characteristics is more true of church-related schools, of non-church-related schools, of both or of neither. The respondents were grouped by those who thought that requiring courses in religion is important and those who thought such courses should be optional. The group that thought religion courses should be required tended to rank the following characteristics as more true at church-related schools than at non-church-related schools: (1) strong sense of community; (2) students develop a more complete philosophy of life; (3) lifelong values are instilled; (4) gives students an extension of their own family; (5) there is a basis of common experience. (See Table 4 for list of characteristics.)

Responses to the same question (statements of characteristics) were grouped by responses from parents of male students and of female students. While there was no significant difference in their responses, slightly more parents of females than males prefer a school where "social life is campus centered" to one where "many activities are planned in the community," and a school where "religion courses are required" than to where they are "optional." Men were about equally divided in their preference for the amount of scholarly activity required of faculty, but twice as many women preferred that "faculty be required to conduct research and publish articles" than that "few requirements be made of faculty."

Responses to two other questions were grouped by responses of parents of male students and female students. One question dealt with the importance to them of their child attending a prestigious school and another with the importance of financial aid where their child would enroll. There was no significant difference in their replies; in both groups the majority indicated attending a prestigious school was not important to their decision nor was financial aid important to the decision of where to enroll.

Responses to four questions were grouped by the residence of respondents to see if where they lived affected their perspective. There was no significant difference in the responses of those who lived in South Carolina, those who lived in other Southeastern states, and those who lived outside the region. There were only three questions that showed any difference in responses; a slightly larger proportion of South Carolinians rated as important the availability of financial aid, the label "prestigious," and emphasis on liberal arts rather than career related courses.

Responses to questions about ideal size, ideal price and ideal distance from home were grouped by residence of respondents. The majority (three out of five) of all three groups said 2,000 to 3,999 is the ideal size for a school; there was no significant difference in their responses. While three out of four parents in South Carolina and the Southeast considered the ideal price of tuition to be $5,000 to $9,999, the majority of parents from outside the region considered $10,000 to $11,999 to be the ideal price.

The greatest disparity of answers among the three groups was over the ideal distance. Four out of five South Carolinians thought 100 to 199 miles was the ideal distance with two out of five from the Southeast and one out of five others agreeing. A third of those from the Southeast and a majority (56.0 percent) outside the region indicated 200 to 499 miles was the ideal distance. Ten percent or less of any of the groups chose "500 or more miles" as ideal.

One question related to size asked respondents what they consider the ideal enrollment and another asked them to classify Furman as small, medium, or large. The majority (57.6 percent) of parents who are residents of South Carolina classify Furman as medium-sized. Seven out of ten outside the state classify Furman as small. The answers, when compared to a specific range in enrollment figures considered ideal show that the majority of the respondents who classify Furman as small and those who classify Furman as medium agree on the ideal size: 2,000 to 3,999.

Overall there were no unusual or unexpected results when reponses were grouped for comparison of parents of male students and female students, of parents in South Carolina, in the Southeast, and elsewhere, or of parents' responses to related questions.

Summary

During the 1987 spring term, 300 questionnaires were mailed to parents of currently enrolled freshmen at Furman. The majority of responses received were from parents of female freshmen (60.2 percent from parents of females; 39.8 percent from parents of males). Respondents live predominantly in the Southeast; 74.3 percent live in the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, or Virginia. Almost all (99.1 percent) indicated they were involved to some degree in the college selection process. The majority (52.7 percent) were involved in every aspect of the decision. Nine out of ten (90.3 percent) accompanied their child on visits to campuses. They described as "ideal" a school with an enrollment between 2,000 and 3,999, within 100 to 200 miles of their home, and costing between $5,000 and $9,999.

While most (69.6 percent) encouraged their child to apply for financial aid, the majority of parents (59.8 percent) indicated that whether the child received financial aid was not a deciding factor in the decision of which school to attend. Among the sources of information the parents found most useful were campus visits and college publications of admissions requirements. Four out of five were satisfied with the amount and kind of information they received from Furman.

When asked to choose from a list of twenty-two selected characteristics of schools the ones most important to them as parents, 99.1 percent valued "a high quality program" and that "development of personal values (be) stressed on campus and in the curriculum." Parents' preferences clearly indicated that parents prefer a school where "most students live on campus" (93.6 percent), the "faculty are well-regarded for teaching" (92.2 percent), "the use of alcohol is prohibited on campus" (85.2 percent), and "strict rules of conduct are enforced" (74.3 percent).

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APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER FOR PARENTS SURVEY

FURMAN UNIVERSITY
FOUNDED 1826
GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA 29613

Office of Institutional Planning and Research

April 13, 1987

Dear Parents:

We're glad to have your son/daughter at Furman. We hope he/she is enjoying this first year with us.

We are interested in your perspective as parents of freshmen. Your opinions about your experiences as you and your son/daughter went through the process of selecting a college can be helpful to us. While the selection process is fresh in your mind, we would appreciate your sharing with us your impressions about how you and your son/daughter came to your decision and what information was most helpful to you. We plan to begin the analysis at the end of May. We would like your opinions included. Enclosed is a questionnaire and a stamped envelope in which to return your response. All responses are confidential. No individual opinions will be reported; a group profile will be developed from all the replies.

Yours truly,

Philip C. Winstead

Philip C. Winstead
Coordinator of Institutional
Planning and Research

PCW:pt
Enclosures

APPENDIX B

INSTRUMENT: PARENTS SURVEY

PARENTS SURVEY

This is a study of the opinions of parents whose son/daughter is currently enrolled as a freshman at Furman University. Please take a few moments of your time to give us some background information and then answer questions about the selection process you went through that led to your son/daughter enrolling at Furman.

1. Background information:
   My state of residence is _____ ZIP code_____
   My child that is a freshman at Furman is: _____male _____female
   Furman was my child's _____first choice _____second choice _____third or less choice
   Furman was my _____first choice _____second choice _____third or less choice

2. We are interested in the aspects of a college or university that were important to you, AS A PARENT, as you considered which school your child would attend. Circle the appropriate number.

	Not at all Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Very Important	Extremely Important	No Opinion
a. a high quality program	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. a faculty more involved in teaching than in research	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. more emphasis on liberal arts courses than on career-related courses	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. a wide variety of courses	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. a place where students spend a lot of time studying	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. high-ability students find the college attractive	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. people on campus are friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. more emphasis on career-related courses than on liberal arts	1	2	3	4	5	6
i. many different clubs and activities are available	1	2	3	4	5	6
j. excellent food service and living arrangements	1	2	3	4	5	6
k. active social life at the college	1	2	3	4	5	6
l. pretty campus	1	2	3	4	5	6
m. availability of financial aid	1	2	3	4	5	6
n. reasonable tuition	1	2	3	4	5	6
o. graduates get good jobs	1	2	3	4	5	6
p. good reputation among high school counselors	1	2	3	4	5	6
q. equal emphasis on liberal arts and career-related courses	1	2	3	4	5	6
r. commitment to helping students adjust to living on their own	1	2	3	4	5	6
s. a Cultural Life Program which includes presentations on religious, political and social issues	1	2	3	4	5	6
t. development of personal values stressed on campus and in curriculum	1	2	3	4	5	6
u. considered prestigious	1	2	3	4	5	6
v. private institution	1	2	3	4	5	6

3. We are especially interested in your views on the overall cost of a college education. As a parent, how important were each of the following factors related to financial aid in your child's selection of a college? How would you rate the amount of information Furman provided you on each factor?

	DEGREE OF IMPORTANCE			AMOUNT OF INFORMATION		
	Very Important	Moderately Important	Not At All Important	Too Little	About Right	Too Much
Total cost	1	2	3	1	2	3
Amount of money we were expected to contribute from our own resources	1	2	3	1	2	3
The way the institution responded to questions about financial aid	1	2	3	1	2	3
Early evaluation on amount of aid	1	2	3	1	2	3
Availabilty of merit or achievement scholarships	1	2	3	1	2	3
Availabilty of alternative payment plans	1	2	3	1	2	3
Size of need-based loans	1	2	3	1	2	3
Size of need-based grants	1	2	3	1	2	3

4. How involved were you, as a parent, in the following aspects of your child's selection of a college? Check all that apply.

CHECK HERE:

_____ a. Read the materials from most of the colleges and universities.
_____ b. Just read the materials from colleges my child said he/she was interested in.
_____ c. Read none of the materials sent by institutions.
_____ d. Accompanied my child on visits to campuses.
_____ e. Joined in on my child's campus interviews.
_____ f. Did not visit any colleges with my child.
_____ g. Encouraged my child to consider a liberal arts college.
_____ h. Encouraged my child to concentrate on business administration.
_____ i. Felt that my child should have an education that is practical.
_____ j. Thought my child would be happier in a small school.
_____ k. Thought my child would be better off at a large university.
_____ l. Set a limit on how much I/we could afford to pay for college.
_____ m. Discussed the cost of college with my child.
_____ n. Encouraged my child to consider a state-supported school.
_____ o. Preferred my child to stay within 100 miles of home.
_____ p. Encouraged my child to look at colleges in other parts of the country.
_____ q. Contacted institutions to request more information for my child to consider.
_____ r. Encouraged my child to apply to my/my spouse's alma mater.
_____ s. Strongly encouraged my child to apply for merit/achievement scholarships.
_____ t. Encouraged my child to consider schools that offer career-related courses.
_____ u. Encouraged my child to attend a private college.
_____ v. Encouraged my child to consider a religiously affiliated college/university.
_____ w. Discouraged my child from applying to my or my spouse's alma mater.
_____ x. Wanted my child to attend a prestigious institution.

5. Which of the following is closest to your opinion of the role you, as a parent, played in helping your child choose the colleges he/she applied to? Circle the most appropriate letter code.

a. I was involved in the decision from the time my child first started thinking about going to college. I took a very active interest in reading or discussing most of the information/literature my child received.

b. I became involved in discussions about different colleges and universities with my child off and on. We talked about the schools in which he/she was interested at the moment.

c. I spent quite a bit of time talking to other people with children in college and collecting information about schools which I passed on to my son/daughter.

d. My child did much of the research on colleges on his/her own. I took a more active role in the final application procedure once he/she had narrowed down the list of possibilities.

e. The decision was entirely up to my child; I stayed out of the process completely.

f. I determined certain guidelines, such as distance from home, cost, size, curriculum, etc. It was up to my child to choose a college or university within these guidelines.

6. Did you encourage your child to apply for financial aid?..... _____NO _____YES

7. Did your child receive financial aid?..... _____NO _____YES

If yes, were you satisfied with the amount he/she received?..... _____NO _____YES

If no, why were you dissatisfied? _____

8. Did you expect that your child would receive financial aid?..... _____NO _____YES

9. Did financial aid play an important part in where your child enrolled?..... _____NO _____YES

10. Listed below are two contrasting characteristics of colleges. Please indicate which of the two you, as a parent, would prefer for your child. Your perception of the ideal college or university might not be described by either of the phrases listed, but we want you to tell us which of the two you prefer for your child. Place a check on the line following the statement.

PREFER CHARACTERISTIC A		PREFER CHARACTERISTIC B		NO OPINION
Faculty are well-known scholars and scientists	1	Faculty are well-regarded for teaching	2	3
Career-related courses are emphasized	1	Liberal arts are emphasized	2	3
Social life is campus centered	1	Many social activities in the community	2	3
Strong varsity athletics	1	Clubs and informal recreation activities	2	3
School is thought of as prestigious, elite, and demanding	1	School is considered academically good with less academic pressure	2	3
Faculty are required to conduct research and publish articles	1	Few scholarly requirements are made of faculty	2	3
A degree from a private college will help more than a degree from a public college	1	It really doesn't matter where the degree is from as long as the education is good	2	3
Computer literacy is required	1	Computer literacy is optional	2	3
Courses in religion are required	1	No formal requirements in religion	2	3
Students provide volunteer service in the community	1	Students concentrate on studies and campus activities	2	3
Strict rules of conduct are enforced	1	Individual freedom stressed, few rules	2	3
Use of alcohol prohibited on campus	1	Use of alcohol permitted on campus	2	3
Most students live on campus	1	Many students live off campus	2	3

11. Please think about church-related liberal arts colleges and non-church-related liberal arts colleges. Read the following list of descriptions and indicate how you feel non-church-related liberal arts colleges and church-related colleges like Furman compare on each statement by circling the appropriate number.

	More true at non-church-related liberal arts colleges	More true at church-related liberal arts colleges	True of both	Not true of either
a. Considered top-notch	1	2	3	4
b. Strong sense of community	1	2	3	4
c. Political and social values are conservative	1	2	3	4
d. Graduates have greater success	1	2	3	4
e. Students are isolated from real life	1	2	3	4
f. There is more social regulation	1	2	3	4
g. There is a strong sense of tradition	1	2	3	4
h. Students are nurtured	1	2	3	4
i. Students develop a more complete philosophy of life	1	2	3	4
j. Students develop a sense of personal responsibility	1	2	3	4
k. Prepare students for careers	1	2	3	4
l. Intellectually stimulating	1	2	3	4
m. Provide intelligent role models	1	2	3	4
n. There is a sense of social responsibility	1	2	3	4
o. Instill lifelong values	1	2	3	4
p. Give students an extension of their own family	1	2	3	4
q. There is a basis of common experience	1	2	3	4
r. Provide diversity	1	2	3	4
s. Take an academically narrow point of view	1	2	3	4
t. Emphasize personal growth in addition to academic achievement	1	2	3	4

12. From the preceding list, which are the two MOST IMPORTANT to you?
Write the corresponding letters here: _____ _____

13. Would you classify Furman University as small, medium, or large? Circle one: SMALL MEDIUM LARGE

14. From each of the following please indicate the dimension you consider ideal in a college, whether it describes Furman or not. Circle the most appropriate number code for each.

IDEAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS
1. 0- 499
2. 500- 999
3. 1000-1999
4. 2000-3999
5. 4000-6999
6. 7000 and over

IDEAL DISTANCE FROM HOME
1. 0- 99 miles
2. 100-199
3. 200-499
4. 500 and over

IDEAL TOTAL PRICE
1. $ 0-$ 1,999
2. $ 2,000-$ 4,999
3. $ 5,000-$ 9,999
4. $10,000-$11,999
5. $12,000 and over

15. How useful were the following sources of information about colleges? Circle the most appropriate code number.

	Not at all Useful	Slightly Useful	Moderately Useful	Very Useful	Extremely Useful	No Opinion
a. College publications	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Admissions requirements	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Personal contacts with students who attend	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. Personal contacts with graduates	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. Personal contacts with professors	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. Contacts with admissions officers	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. Campus visits	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. High school counselors	1	2	3	4	5	6
i. High school teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6
j. College days/nights to meet college representative	1	2	3	4	5	6
k. College recruiters who visited the high school	1	2	3	4	5	6
l. Telephone calls from students	1	2	3	4	5	6
m. Contacts from coaches	1	2	3	4	5	6
n. Publications from specific departments at the school	1	2	3	4	5	6
o. Publications written by students attending the school	1	2	3	4	5	6
p. Receptions held in you area	1	2	3	4	5	6
q. Contacts from former students	1	2	3	4	5	6
r. Friends and/or children of friends	1	2	3	4	5	6
s. Videos	1	2	3	4	5	6
t. College guidebooks	1	2	3	4	5	6

16. In thinking back over the selection process, what were the three most important things that you, as a parent, wanted to know about the schools to which your child applied?

MOST IMPORTANT _____

SECOND MOST IMPORTANT _____

THIRD MOST IMPORTANT _____

THANK YOU.

Please return questionnaire to:
Philip C. Winstead
Institutional Planning and Research
Furman University
Greenville, SC 29613